In the Digital Training Camp: Taking traditional diplomacy into the digital age

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IN THE DIGITAL TRAINING CAMP

TAKING TRADITIONAL DIPLOMACY INTO THE DIGITAL AGE

Social media have permanently changed the area of foreign policy: transparency in political activity, interaction rather than mere information, and communication on an equal footing are but a few of the implications for a reconfiguration of international relations. Governmental actors are responding to these changes in the digital world. Thus, states such as the USA, Great Britain and Sweden have already defined communication via social networks as one of the core tasks of their foreign policy. They use cyberspace as a medium for conducting virtual diplomacy – and in this way, they try to bring their foreign policy into line with the changes in media.

Transnational public spheres

With its decentralised communication structure and a reach that is potentially unlimited, the Internet contributes to the constitution of public space and to that which the philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas calls "The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere"[1]: Through the emergence of a public sphere, a heterogeneous general public has created a space where it comes together, permits the circulation of various opinions, and reflects on the activities of its own and foreign governments. Ethan Zuckerman, a scholar at the Berkman Center for Internet and Society, describes the changes in communication structures thus:
They provide a new rhetorical space where a new generation of leaders can think and speak freely. In the long run, this ability to create a new public sphere, parallel to the one controlled by the state, will empower a new generation of social actors.[2]

Politically speaking, the significant change wrought by Web 2.0 represents a transnational decentralisation of power.

If people are given the ability to control information, to make people listen to them, and to exchange opinions with others, part of the power held by states or businesses shifts to smaller organisations or to individual users,[3]
says Ben Scott, fellow of the Stiftung Neue Verantwortung and former innovation adviser to U.S.

1 See Habermas, Jürgen (2006): Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft. Frankfurt am Main.

2 Zuckerman, Ethan (2010): Internet Freedom: Beyond Circumvention, in: http://www.ethanzuckerman.com/blog/2010/02/22/internet-freedom-beyond-circumvention/ (viewed on 26.06.12).

3 Newsroom (2012): Das Internet ist nicht der Feenstaub der Demokratie, in: http://www.newsroom.at/news/detail/703284/ (viewed on 15. February 2012).

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Access to knowledge and information leads to the relativisation of hierarchies between the actors "state" and "citizen", and thus to a disruption of the diplomatic order as it existed until a short time ago. That has ramifications for foreign policy: at this point, new information- and communication technology has changed the structures and the work of foreign ministries.

Loss of control and fantasies of control

Social media have fostered a change of direction in communication – from one-way communication, without a direct confrontation of the recipient with the sender, to a two-way flow. Communication flows in the world of diplomacy no longer run only in one direction, and they do not take place exclusively on the governmental level. Quite to the contrary: the new technologies allow for communication between governments and societies.

If information has been made public, it is much harder today for states to control that information. Traditional media such as newspapers or television are constrained by editorial filters that no longer exist on the Social Web. The two-way communication that has arisen as a result allows not only for messages from a sender, but also participation by a recipient. Thus it is possible, thanks to the new technologies, for individuals to qualify statements by foreign ministries on the pages of social networks, to criticise them, or to manipulate them with false statements. In addition, there are regimes, armies or terror networks such as Al-Qaida,[4] that use the open and transparent quality of the Internet to advance their propaganda goals and to weaken their opponents. As a consequence, it will no longer be possible to route political communication exclusively through the foreign policy actors who have been responsible for it up until now. In the digital age, public opinion is also shaped by people or groups not associated with governments. For this reason, many foreign ministries and diplomats in Europe feel an even greater need to gain control over the information system and over transnational public spheres.

Representatives of the U.S. government recently got a sense of the limits of control in virtual communication spaces through the video "Kony 2012". The digital campaign by the nonprofit organisation Invisible Children constitutes a viral best-practice example for people-to-people diplomacy in the field of human rights. It is a successful example of how to break open political hierarchies in a way that enables smaller nongovernmental organisations and civil societies to take the reigns of world politics into their own hands.

It's always been that the decisions are made by the few with the money, and the power dictated the priorities of their government [...]. But now there's something bigger than that. The people of the world see each other and can protect each other. It's turning the system upside down,[5]

says a young, unknown actor in the video, regarding the social-media phenomenon. Young people all over the world have become involved with Invisible Children. Together, by using the video, they were able to get a subject placed on the U.S. foreign policy agenda that was not likely to be of importance to political decision makers. President Barack Obama reacted to the campaign in October

4 See Stalinsky, Steven (2012): Second-Tier Al-Qaeda Activists Embrace Twitter for Online Jihad: The Case of the Ansarullah Blog, in: MEMRI, 9.02.2012, http://www.thememriblog.org/blog_personal/en/41703.htm (viewed on 30.06.2012).

5 Invisible Children (2012): Kony 2012, in: YouTube, 5.03.2012, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4MnpzG5Sqc (viewed on 20.06.2012).

2011 with a military action against the LRA (Lord's Resistance Army) in the east African country where it was operating.

On the other hand, the case of "Kony 2012" depicts the dilemma in which foreign policy actors in the Internet age find themselves: smaller institutions and groups of civilians exert pressure on the world of diplomacy through such actions.

More and more people will have access to the kind and quality of information that was previously reserved for governments. Digital media do not fundamentally change the diplomatic process, but it expands the number of influencers, accelerates the process and can generate sudden shifts in public opinion.[6]

The successful distribution of the campaign, above all through social media such as Facebook, makes one thing clear in no uncertain terms: governments must learn that in world politics, they are only one among many actors.
"In the 21st century the level of control is going to be decreased," predicts Alec Ross, senior adviser for innovation at the U.S. Department of State.[7] The attempt to regain control over public opinion with all available means can take a toll on one's own credibility. Foreign policy in the age of Web 2.0 means that governmental actors must confront the critical ramifications of the increasing worldwide use of digital and above all social media.

The image of Germany, transparency, civil societies: possibilities and tasks for German foreign policy

For German foreign policy, the use of social media posits more than a change on an organisational level. It requires from practitioners a change in their way of thinking. New forms and strategies for foreign policy must be developed. Nowhere else must the use of social media be approached with more caution and sensitivity than in the field of international relations. But to what extent do social media already play a role in shaping German foreign policy? Is there a social media strategy, and if not, how should one be formulated?

For the moment, the awareness of the relevance of social media for the enhancement of Germany's image abroad has evidently increased greatly. The Federal Foreign Office's presence on the social media platforms Facebook and Twitter is growing. In the process, the office works with social media guidelines that are designed to ensure successful and ongoing communication by the Federal Foreign Office and its diplomatic missions within the social media.[8] The communication goals that have been defined include the dissemination of a positive image of Germany and a positive depiction of the work and organisation of the diplomatic missions, as well as the collection of information from German citizens about the situation in the country where they reside as expatriates. The enhancement of Germany's image abroad –

6 Crowley, P.J. (2012): Diplomacy in the Digital Age, in: IPDGC Blog, 10.03.2012, http://takefiveblog.org/tag/kony-2012/ (viewed on 29.06.2012).

7 See Alec Ross, cited by Lichtenstein, Jesse (2010): Digital Diplomacy, in: The New York Times, 16.07.2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/18/magazine/18web2-0-t.html?pagewanted=all (viewed on 27.06.2012).

8 See Sohn, Gunnar (2012): Wenn Guido zwitschert, in: The European, 12.12.2011, http://www.theeuropean.de/gunnarsohn/9188-facebook-erlass-fuer-das-auswaertige-amt (viewed on 27.06.2012).

that is, public diplomacy – is the current focus of work within the Social Web.[9]

Civil societies as a new target group

The potential for German foreign policy that is inherent in new information and communication technology is, however, still far from being fully realised. Events over the past few years – as, for example, the Arab Revolution – have brought a new target audience into focus in the area of diplomacy: nongovernmental actors, and namely, not just international organisations and nongovernmental organisations, but also and above all citizens who are not connected to any institution, who now play a growing role in international politics.

One conclusion of the Arab Social Media Report of the Dubai School of Government states that in 2011, there was a significant development in the use of social media – from private, social use, to political uses.[10] The Arab Revolution was carried out first and foremost by the younger generation. Political upsets in Tunisia and Egypt would not have been possible without a youth connected to the Internet. These "digital natives," who fought for their freedom using social media as a medium for organisation and mobilisation, personify a new self-awareness and demand to participate in the future political organisation of their countries.

Thus, German foreign policy faces the challenge of not only communicating with the governments of other countries, but increasingly, of integrating civil societies and individuals into its communication strategy. Social media such as Twitter and Facebook are important for reaching young civil societies that are networked with each other, and they make dialogue with these societies possible without detours via other governments and traditional media. With the help of direct feedback from target audiences, foreign policy strategies can be developed, and those already in existence can be revised.

Transparency and credibility

German foreign policy can use social media in a targeted way, in order to gain a more authentic picture of civil societies locally than is possible by using traditional media. An analysis of the "network opinion" constituted on the Social Web offers the chance to better understand public dialogues abroad. It can give advance notice of national conflicts in the making, and thus holds great potential for foreign and security policy.

Transparency and interaction are two bywords that at first do not seem to be in keeping with the discreet nature of classic diplomacy. The use of social media thus far by individual states ultimately reflects the various cultural approaches to this new, digital form of diplomacy. Thus, for example, the Federal Foreign Office in Berlin forbids the operation of Twitter accounts by diplomats using their own names, in order to prevent the intermingling of private and state affairs. This would present the danger that the "tweeting" of the foreign policy actors is more likely to result in diplomatic tensions than in a rapprochement on the cultural and political level. All the same, an English language Twitter account has been set up for the Federal Foreign Office (@GermanyDiplo), but this account primarily contains news from the

9 Author's comment: The Facebook page of the German Embassy in Washington can be regarded as a best-practice example; see http://www.facebook.com/GermanEmbassy-Washington (viewed on 25.06.2012).

10 See Dubai School of Government (2011): Facebook Usage: Factors and Analysis, http://www.dsg.ae/en/Publication/Pdf_En/ASMR_Final_Feb_08Low.pdf (viewed on 25.06.2012).

Federal Foreign Office, links to its own Website, and retweets with information from the Permanent Mission of Germany to the United Nations. In both cases, there is hardly any possibility of interaction – an approach that indicates the lack of a communication strategy regarding dialogue with local populations.

It is not enough for foreign ministries to respond to Tweets and Facebook comments for reasons of social-media netiquette. Only the active and participatory use of new information and communication technologies will allow for the emergence of a dialogue that will in turn open up opportunities for German foreign policy: if one gets involved in discussions at the right point in time, one can increase one's visibility and communicate directly with large public audiences. And the discourse with civil societies through social networks such as Facebook and Twitter can be helpful in deducing specific values for dealing with these regions.

"Tweeting away" international tensions?

As the American example in Syria demonstrates, digital diplomacy can help improve strained relations between one's own government and other nations: for reasons of security, in February 2012, the United States initiated the closure of its diplomatic mission in Syria and recalled its ambassador. Ever since intergovernmental relations were put on ice, the Department of State has made great efforts to maintain a connection to the Syrian people, particularly in cyberspace. The recalled ambassador, Robert Ford, specifically seeks to maintain a dialogue with Syrian citizens, and uses social media to bring the violence and repression in the country to the attention of the international public. Facebook and Twitter are used extensively to this end: the Twitter account of the U.S. Mission in Damascus, @USEmbassySyria, primarily links to Robert Ford's more detailed messages on the Facebook fanpage of the U.S. Embassy. By publishing personal reports once a week, he regularly stirs up debates, answers questions, and states his position regarding voices critical of the United States. At this juncture, Web 2.0 technology allows for civilians to really participate in foreign policy processes and developments. In his message from 12 June 2012, for instance, the ambassador promises continued intensive support and reinforcement of the opposition:
Finally, consistent with longstanding U.S. government efforts to support the peaceful opposition in Syria, we are also providing non-lethal aid, including communication equipment, to peaceful democracy activists. The United States will continue to coordinate our efforts with the international community in order to increase pressure on the regime and have the biggest impact on what we are collectively doing.[11]

Digital diplomacy consequently functions as a helpful method of linking governmental representatives to local populations and supports governments effectively in their efforts to reach foreign-policy goals.

11 U.S. Embassy Damascus (2012): A Note from Ambassador Ford, in: Facebook, 12.06.2012, http://www.facebook.com/notes/us-embassy-damascus/a-note-from-ambassador-ford/10150878536371938 (viewed on 29.06.2012).

Looking beyond the borders of the Arab world

Directing the focus in foreign policy merely toward Iran and the Arab world will not suffice for a communication strategy. In the face of the growing access to the Internet in advanced developing countries in Latin America, Africa, Eastern Europe and Asia, it is a worthwhile endeavour to call into question the existing target audiences in German foreign policy, and define new regional priorities where necessary. Today there are an estimated 2.3 billion Internet users, among them 400 million in China alone.[12] With more than 50 million users, Russia constitutes the largest Internet community in Europe. Furthermore, the number of smartphones is projected to rise by 20 percent in the next two years. Of this growth, 75 percent will be in developing countries, above all on the African continent.[13]

The enormous spread and extensive use of the Internet should not however belie the existence of a "digital divide." This exists already as a gulf between those who have Internet access, and the rest. And it is exacerbated by language barriers. Even if the Internet has a global reach, content and topics on Twitter that lead to an uproar in world politics are largely written in English. The Internet, which has been declared to be an "Open Web", is thus not accessible to those whose knowledge of English is insufficient. A range of multilingual social media services is accordingly an essential aspect of digital diplomacy. In order to enter into a really interactive dialogue with foreign public audiences, it is important for German foreign cultural and educational policy to present its own Web 2.0 offerings in the languages of target regions. In the Middle East, where a good two-thirds of the population is under 30 years old, foreign policy is confronted with a particularly media-aligned and networked citizenship that will be decisive in determining the future of the internet.[14] The U.S. Department of State can provide an example here: recently, in addition to the already existing Twitter feeds in Arabic, Chinese, English, Farsi, French, Hindi, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Urdu, the Turkish-language Twitter account @ABDTurk was launched.[15]

In many countries, national and local social media services play a more prominent role than the global players Facebook and Twitter. This phenomenon can be found especially in states in which the media environment is restrictive. Here, national network pages gain considerable ground. When one considers, for example, the rigid censorship in China, Russia or the Ukraine, one finds that national network pages provide possibilities that should not be underestimated for the free formation and expression of political opinions.

Thus, during the protests in December 2011, activists in Russia not only used Twitter, but also articulated their protest to a large degree on the social network page VKontakte and on LiveJournal,

12 See Gustin, Sam (2011): Digital Diplomacy, in: Time Specials, 2.09.2011, http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2091589_2091591_2091592,00.html (viewed on 30.06.2012).

13 See Sniderman, Zachary (2011): Why Tech is Key to the U.S. State Department's Mission, in: Mashable, 22.08.2011, http://mashable.com/2011/08/22/alec-ross-tech-interview/ viewed on 30.06.2012).

14 See Howard, Alex (2011): Empowering digital diplomacy at the edge of the network, in: O'Reilly Radar, 1.03.2011, http://radar.oreilly.com/2011/03/state-department-twitter.html (viewed on 29.06.2012).

15 See World Bulletin (2012): U.S. Department of State Launches Turkish-Language Twitter Account, http://www.worldbulletin.net/?aType=haberYazdir&ArticleID=84689&tip=, (viewed on 23.01.2012).

the most popular blog in the country.[16] In China tweeting is also very popular. But the Chinese like to tweet most of all in their own language, and what is more, they do not use Twitter itself, but the microblogs called Weibo, which are similar to Twitter. Of the approximately 1.3 billion people in China, 300 million communicate on these microblogging platforms. Weibo users discuss national issues and conflicts and use the service for example, to bring attention to local abuses, or to demand political reforms.

The Chinese people now have a mechanism to hold authorities accountable for wrongdoing. [...] Major political power struggles and scandals are no longer kept within elite circles,
says Rebecca Mackinnon, a former CNN journalist and co-founder of Global Voices Online, enumerating the advantages of Weibo.[17] In Cuba, likewise, the domestic social media services RedSocial and EcuRed are among the central platforms of the opposition.[18] In the field of foreign policy, one can deduce the following from all of this: foreign governments can not only take a reading of prevalent political positions and ideologies on the Weibo portals and on social media services such as RedSocial, but they can also initiate a dialogue with civil societies that would not be possible on Western network pages such as Facebook or Twitter.

New media, new topics

German foreign cultural and educational policy has both a task and an opportunity: to use new media and communication technology for a new, quality dialogue that will reach not only elites, but also the general public. A digital exchange with these specific target audiences will, however, require the diversification of communication strategies, in regard to both the topics and the media employed. In the area of German public diplomacy, a mix of marketing Germany and cultural diplomacy may be sufficient; digital diplomacy, on the other hand, which addresses civil societies as new public audiences, requires that foreign policy issues that are of interest to these target groups be elaborated. Among other things, this means that German foreign missions must pick up on topics, problems and issues in the respective target country and take them up as a subject of discussion on Facebook and Twitter.

Focussing on a single social network page, as the Federal Foreign Office is now doing, is not sufficient. The Federal Foreign Office's catalogue of guidelines for 2010 applies primarily to Facebook.[19] Concerning the use of other services, one finds only the comment that the standards are also applicable to other platforms. Here one sees however a misunderstanding concerning the characteristics of social media. Thus, Facebook is a good place for conveying a positive image of Germany, and for the maintenance of online communities. With Twitter, the main thing is to express the substance of a message in 140 characters. It is often used by people who are already public figures and have a ready-made audience. For this reason, Twitter could be a

16 Ioffe, Julia (2011): Activists get connected, in: Financial Times, 16.12.2011, http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/a4520742-2607-11e1-856e-00144feabdco.html#axzz1zOA8AOT5 (viewed on 29.06.2012).

17 Mackinnon, Rebecca (2012): The Not-So-Great Firewall of China, in: Foreign Policy, 17.04.2012, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/04/17/the_not_so_great_firewall_of_china (viewed on 29.06.2012).

18 See dpa (2012): Kuba 2.0: Regierung will Dissidenten das Netz nicht überlassen„ in: Hannoversche Allgemeine, 06.01.2012, www.haz.de/Nachrichten/Medien/Netzwelt/Regierung-will-Dissidenten-das-Netz-nicht-ueberlassen (viewed on 29.06.2012).

19 Author's comment: Due to secrecy rules, no source can be given for the social-media guidelines of the Federal Foreign Office dated 10.09.2010.

fitting instrument for foreign policy actors to reactively communicate news from the Federal Foreign Office in a short from.

To put it another way: Twitter and other platforms should not be misunderstood by the actors in German foreign cultural and educational policy as an extension of its PR work. Failing to follow other persons and institutions, to respond to questions and bits of information, and to produce one's own content does not help one achieve credibility on the Social Web. Social media should thus be understood to be that which they are by nature: autarchic and social systems that must be dealt with in another way than traditional media, such as television, for example.

In the digital training camp: moving from traditional to digital diplomacy

It is time for a comprehensive social media strategy, in which all digital social channels are considered, and the communication specific advantages of the individual services should be exploited in the service of the goals of German foreign cultural and educational policy – from the Federal Foreign Office's own web page and those of the embassies, to blogs, and to Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, Google+, and so on. In some cases, an approach that spans multiple social media services can be helpful, as with the campaign "21st Century Statecraft Month". The Foreign Ministry used this heading in Washington during the whole month of January 2012, for regular live Web chats and Q&As with State Department employees, and employed for this purpose a wide range of digital offerings – from Twitter to Facebook and YouTube, in a number of languages.[20]

As it is, the Americans have assumed the leading role in the field of digital diplomacy worldwide. The latest study of the Lowy Institute for International Policy revealed that the State Department operates about 600 external and internal media platforms, with which it reaches more than eight million people directly. All told, 150 employees work full-time, and another 900 part-time on the digital agenda of the U.S. State Department.[21] Unlike their German colleagues, the Americans consider digital diplomacy to be a central foreign-policy strategy. Alongside public diplomacy, they use the most up-to-date technology in other foreign policy areas. Among those are information- and knowledge management, catastrophe management, the promotion of Internet freedom, and even policy planning.

The case of the Egyptian-American journalist Mona Eltahawy provides an example of the successful use of social media as a means of crisis management. Eltahawy was hampered in her work by security personnel in Cairo, sexually harassed, and finally arrested. The U.S. State Department reacted proactively to her Tweet for help, which reached the journalist's 65,000 followers directly, and forced her release within 24 hours.[22]

20 See Stearns, Scott (2012): US State Department Expanding Use of Social Media, in: Voice of America, 5.01.2012, http://www.voanews.com/english/news/usa/US-State-Department-Expanding-Use-of-Social-Media-136840713.html (viewed on 6.01.2012).

21 See Hanson, Fergus (2012): Revolution@State: The Spread of E-Diplomacy, in Lowy Institute for International Policy, 27.03.2012, http://lowyinstitute.org/publications/revolution-state-spread-ediplomacy (viewed on 15.06.2012).

22 See Stewart, Dodai (2011): Writer/Activist Mona Eltahawy Arrested, Beaten, Sexually Assaulted By Police In Cairo, in: Jezebel, 24.11.2011,http://jezebel.com/5862492/writeractivist-mona-eltahawy-arrested-beaten-sexually-assaulted-by-police-in-cairo (viewed on 30.06.2012).

A first step toward digital diplomacy would entail upgrading the Federal Foreign Office's internet presence, beginning with the web page of the Federal Foreign Office, which up until now does not contain any suggestions as to where users can find more information on the Social Web, or how they can enter into a dialogue with diplomats. The press offices of individual embassies do use Twitter to transmit information to target audiences on the institutional level, but there is very little communication with the embassies. This represents a potential for building trust and communicating with the various target audiences that has not been used up until now.

Fast, open, interactive, emotional

An important prerequisite for bringing about more transparency in diplomacy via social media is openness toward unknown actors. One example of how that can function with a high-ranking diplomat is the comprehensive social media strategy of the British Foreign Minister, William Hague. He makes use of the space on Facebook to deliver impressions of his work as foreign minister and comments on milestones of British foreign policy. On Twitter, meanwhile, he communicates his own positions on international politics, releases information on decrees and announcements relevant to the government, and hosts Q&As at regular intervals, for which he himself formulates foreign policy issues.

In a similar manner, the representatives of German foreign policy could use social media as a chance to enter into personal dialogue and to communicate in blogs on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube with their respective target audiences. In the "competition for the world public audience" it is crucial for German foreign policy to convey an authentic and straightforward self-image. This requires, in addition to the ability to handle criticism, a highly developed sensitivity regarding the mentality of both one's own country and that of the target country.

Those who wish to practise digital diplomacy must allow for participation. This entails more than collecting Facebook "likes" and followers on Twitter. Participation means that one must become a part of the communication process, and invest sufficient time in dialogue and the shaping of opinions. A social media strategy designed to put a face on German foreign policy on the Social Web and to make it credible must be fast, interactive, open, and have a more personal tone.

Social media competence is therefore a vital prerequisite for successful foreign policy in the digital age. In order to prepare the representatives of German foreign cultural and educational policy for their new communication and media tasks, it would be a good idea to send them to digital training seminars led by external media and communications experts at regular intervals. There is a need in German foreign policy not only for expertise in the use of new communications tools, but also for language skills. Here one could get the independent mediator organisations within foreign cultural and educational policy involved, such as for example, Deutsch Welle with its media and language expertise.

Summary

Through the use of blogs, microblogging services and other social network pages such as Facebook and YouTube, governments can surmount the limits of traditional diplomacy. Foreign ministries, embassies and governmental representatives have, in the form of social media, innovative tools with which new strategies can be developed in order to connect cultures with one another, to increase sensitivity regarding specific topics, and to quickly disseminate foreign policy positions. Digital diplomacy opens up global possibilities for participation by new target audiences abroad. With a toolbox of various social media applications, actors within German foreign policy can for the first time enter into a dialogue with civil societies in target regions that was never possible in this form within the parameters of traditional diplomacy. Moreover, social media can function as a "mood barometer" helpful in exploring new subject areas and gaining access to new target audiences. The ability to call for audiences to join in a dialogue on foreign policy topics, and to oneself participate in current debates on the Web in a targeted way, or to generate such debates, can give foreign policy actors a chance to prevail in the midst of strained international relations.

New information and communication technology has revolutionised communication in the field of foreign policy. The changes in the realm of media bring in their wake the following consequences for governmental communications: the work to be done in this area will get more complex and will have to be performed at greater speed. Ministries will have to struggle to keep up with online communication and deliver meaningful responses to user comments in a timely manner.

A further unavoidable consequence is that it is not possible to imagine the political future without the participation of new, nongovernmental actors. This leads, for one thing, to a fundamental debate on the question of how online based communication between governments and civil societies should function. For another thing, the latter are in the meantime considered, just like foreign policy representatives, to be "influencers", and are thereby able to participate in foreign policy matters that were previously restricted to diplomats. As the example of "Kony 2012" clearly showed, civil society actors can even exert political pressure if they take advantage of the full potential of social media globally. International relations in the digital age will be more complex and more diffuse – and in a world of "likes" and "hashtags", there is no way for foreign policy to avoid adapting to the changes in media.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anja Türkan was a fellow in the ifa-Research Programme "Culture and Foreign Policy" from July to December 2011, and did her research on the subject of Digital Diplomacy. She studied "Media Culture" at the University of Bremen as well as "Media and Commuications" and "Literary, Cultural and Media Studies" in Siegen and Sydney. In the course of her studies and afterward, Türkan worked in media and in the areas of press and public relations.

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